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EDUCATION PUBLIC POLICIES IN ROMANIA: BETWEEN REALITIES AND 2040 PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

After 1989 the education and professional training system in Romania was under the continuous pressure of multiple changes, reform attempts or punctual actions so that it turns out that, at present, it oscillates between an evolution reform and an intervention reform. The significant negative aspect of the multiple changes or even reform attempts consists in decrying the concept of reform, diluting in short term non-relevant, several times counterproductive actions for the system evolution. Between evolution and intervention, in the context of government decisions and of the local governesses, education public policies represent an absolute priority. At the European level, "post 2020" referential strategies targeting a long run horizon (2040) and having major impact on the educational and professional training systems are already debated. Thus, Romania has to urgently start the process of developing the future prospective 2030 education public policies and even on longer term – 2040. In our paper we try to present some aspects regarding the efforts done by the Ministry of National Education to initiate the process of designing the 2030 or even 2040 horizon education policy and to offer some argued recommendations regarding the option between evolution reform and the intervention reform.

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1. Introduction

The instrument to accomplish the social responsibility of education "to contribute to further the Knowledge Society and Knowledge Economy" Meek, Teichler and Kearney (2009) is the public policy, reforms are done by designing and implementing policies.

The education system is not a separated "island", it is a complex system, in total interdependence with the other systems that make society function, be "alive", democratic and happy. The problem it faces is the slow change comparing to other systems like economy and technology. What should be done in order to compete the systems that are capable of change and thus to answer the actual and future education needs of the society? Education and Training Monitor (2018), published by the European Commission on 16 October 2018, indicates that Romania occupies the last places for most of the indicators pursued by COM. It remains one of the few countries that have not yet reached any of the main targets for 2020 and GDP allocations for education, although rising, are still well below the EU average. Romania has made notable progress in terms of employment rate among young people with studies. However, equity in education, the gap between rural and urban areas and Roma inclusion continue to pose key challenges that have consequences in terms of inclusive growth and inequality in society.

In 2016, Romania recorded the highest increase in education spending (+18.4%), most of which was spent on wage increases or back payments for 2008-2011. However, the allocation of GDP was only 3.7%, still one of the lowest levels in the EU (compared with a European average of 4.7% of GDP).

2. Problem Statement

In a world in continuous change and facing new and new challenges, in which technology give rise to new endeavors, there is a great need to concern about the future and to invest in people, governments face the task to better care of citizens' life and of the society perspective, meaning growing sense of public and civil services quality. The World Bank human capital index calls attention to the link between investments in health and education and the productivity of future. Thus, the ability to develop quality public policies and the capacity to implement them are the chance to answer to the future concerns. The effective public policies development and implementation are fundamental issues. All this made us examine the approaches to and designs of education public policy and strategies in Romanian education system aiming to identify and propose ways to make education public policy effective for future work skills and create the frame for socio – behavioral acquisition, education public policies that are able to create strong connections between education and other sectors, the society at large.

The key indicators of the strategies framework refer to early school leaving rate, weighting factors of tertiary study graduates out of the total population aged 30 -34 and adult participation (aged 25 – 64) to education and training. Regarding early school leaving, at EU level, the proposed 2020 target is at least 10 %, Romania has assumed 11, 3 %. The 2017 registered value is 18, 1 %. The 2020 EU target for the tertiary study graduates (aged 30 -34) is 40 %, at national level being 26, 7 %, in 2017 being touches 26, 3 %. The adult participation to education and training UE target is 15%, at national level it is 10, 0 %, in 2017 being 1, 2%.

Looking at this key indicators and the rates at national level it is clear that there is a need to identify the desired and necessary changes in designing education public policies in order to satisfy the present

needs and for performance in future. It is a matter of perspectives and options, such as to eliminate the oscillation between evolution and intervention public policies.

3. Research Questions

A new European framework post 2020 will promoted and a new European period for budget planning will be launched. Romania has to decide the way it design the strategic planning. The education results demonstrate that the new strategic planning should answer to the actual and future challenges. From the very beginning the decidents should analyze the options and decide to promote the sustainable education policies. This research will make the decidents conscious of an improved approach to design a public policy that make education consonant to the society evolution. The research key questions:

What should be done in order to compete the systems that are capable of change and thus to answer the education needs of the society?

How to opt and design efficient and effective education public policies?

What arguments can contribute to and in what way the education public policies can be connector of education and other sectors/society at large?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to offer the education public policies designers and decision makers the support to decide and design efficient and effective education policies. The study aims to give a unitary approach of the education perspectives and options so as the educational system representatives and all the stake-holders to be bridged and progress towards new strategic planning.

5. Research Methods

The analyses used are qualitative and comparative. The methodology consisted of two interconnected instruments. The first one was desk research as foundation for the further investigation. It consisted of reviewing the previous research findings in order to get a broad understanding of the way the education public policies are approached and to get the preliminary conceptual model to be developed. The second one, the case study consisted of determining the research questions, collect, evaluate and analyze the education public policies compared to education results, prepare the findings report and draw the conclusions.

6. Findings

6.1. Analyse of the Romanian National Strategic Framework for Education and Training

The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) has developed the national strategic framework for education and training, consisting of 5 sectorial strategies: Early School Leaving strategy in Romania; the National Strategy for Tertiary Education 2015-2020; Lifelong Learning National Strategy 2015 – 2020; Strategy for Education and Training Strategy 2016-2020. The fifth strategy for modernizing the education infrastructure 2018 – 2023 has been developed and is to be approved by the Romanian Government. Four of the five mentioned ex – ante conditionality strategies are approved by Govern Order and validated by

the European Commission. Four of the five strategies had been developed with World Bank technical assistance.

The 5 sectorial strategies were designed in a coherent manner, based on programmatic national and European documents Europa 2020, Education and Training 2020 – ET 2020, Governance programs and so on . The 5 strategies are interconnected and retrospect to the following polestars:

➢ Ensuring equal access chances and improving school and university participation;

➢ Quality assurance of education for all education levels;

➢ Promoting curricula/study syllabus and evaluation/assessment systems to allow getting relevant competencies for labour market;

➢ Promoting good governance; ensuring autonomy and assuming public responsibility;

➢ Improving the human resources initial and continuous training system;

➢ Adequate financing system and modernizing the infrastructure (including equipment and labs);

➢ Using new technologies (digital text – books and inter – active learning – teaching – assessment methods, Internet access, E- learning platforms and so on);

➢ Developing the vocational education (including the multiplication of partnerships with economic medium);

➢ Encouraging the education mobility and European and international cooperation.

The MoNE decided an Implementing, Monitoring and Evaluation Unitary Coordination Framework formed by 5 Strategy Implementation Coordinating Technical Groups, a Monitoring Committee and an Evaluation Body. The working groups elaborate the Annual Action Plans for Implementing the Strategies and annual monitoring reports for each of the four approved strategies. The General Directorate for Strategic Management and Public Policies, within MoNE, annually elaborates an integrated report regarding monitoring of the sectorial strategies for education and training which is validated by the Monitoring Committee.

At national level, the implementing instrument for Europa 2020 is the Reform National Plan made up of the measures assembly undertaken by the Romanian authorities in order to touch the national objectives for Europe 2020 Strategy, to implement the national development priorities, to eliminate obstacles in economic growth and in work force occupancy, to implement the priorities established by the European Commission by the Annual Growth Analyses, and for implementing the specific country recommendation. By the Reform National Plan there are monitored measures, actions and priority projects that come under the objectives of the ex-ante conditionality strategies and which are to be found in the strategies plans of action.

The MoNE Strategic Institutional Plan is made up from the perspective of ministry role for education and training. It is the strategic planning document that covers the medium and long term public policies planning, including the allocated budget. The plan sights out the insurance of governance and the effective and transparent activity of MoNE. The Strategic Institutional Plan is structured on five strategic objectives which correspond to the general objectives of the strategies.

6.2. Aspects regarding the dynamics of the basic education legislative document

The national Law of Education (2011) suffered several modifications and completions. From among 365 law articles, 162 were modified, representing 43% of the total number of articles. The architecture of

the national education law is based on the structure of Education Law - 1995 and on the Teaching Staff Statute – 1997. Now, the law generates syncope in education system functioning. "Educated Romania" is the national project initiated by the Romanian President, being meant to resetting the society on values, to develop a success culture based on performance, work, talent, honesty and integrity. The Presidential Administration organized (2016 – 2018) an ample public debate regarding education and research on the 2018 – 2030 horizon. Will the main decision makers, economic milieu, union trades, the direct beneficiary and civil society be successful in finding means of communication and in agreeing upon the major education options on medium and long term?

6.3. References to the European Education and Training Framework and The Multiannual Financial Framework post 2020

The Education and Training post 2020 framework will consider promoting and sustaining the efforts of the member states in becoming more efficient and in their orientation towards the necessary competencies for the future society. In their strategic options the education systems must pursue lifelong learning grounded on informed decisions, on prognoses and synthesis. Cooperation post ET 2020 may essentially inspire the politic debates, motivate changes and create new European consensus. Future cooperation has to include the digitalization impact and the technological development, the clime changes, the sustainable development.

The exchanges on the labour market due to the new technologies request learning as a key opportunity in European economic and social development, essentially being the education and training from the perspective of access and quality. The Multiannual Financial Framework correlates the resources with the aspirations. Consultations with member states, the European Parliament and with the public take place in order to settle into shape equitable, well balanced and result oriented proposals for an EU budget as European added value growth factor. The Multiannual Financial Framework 2021 – 2027 offers stability for planning investments from the perspective of a balanced budget. This financial framework helps European Union to apply the common policies and to answer the actual European and international challenges. In the multiannual financial exercise 2021 – 2027, the allocation must correspond to the Commission priorities, based on what is functioning well in present and on anticipating the future challenges.

6.4. Perspectives and Options

The debates regarding the change perspectives of the education system in Romania should be based on data obtained from scientific researches in implementing changes in social macro systems and to consider the socio – economic development directions as well as the new paradigm of learning (autonomy, personal development, digitalization, teacher training, leadership and management). We consider that there are two ways to change the education and training macro system: the intervention reform which means transformation and reinventing and the evolution reform which refer to improvement and adjunction/supplement.

The intervention reform implies a new vision on education, assuming the social, cultural and economic perspectives, integrating education in the entirety, changes at the level of school culture, practices and values. The intervention reform could be associated to W. Edward Deming's theories, partisan of the

dramatic organizational changes. Evolution reform involves focusing on problems, system internal changes, immediate results and the stability of internal components. This reform could be associated to Kaizen philosophy (continuous improvement – Japanese language) that means continuous improvement of work practices, of personal efficiency as a business/ affair philosophy, in the circumstances of minimum expenditure (The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 1993). The Kaizen philosophy is applied at work, at home and in social life with little, constant, growing and improving effort. If other people gamble on innovation and implementation of the new generation technologies with great progress in short time, Kaizen can lead to significant progress by little, unspectacular changes, practical enterprises and reduced costs.

Reforms are promoted by means of public policies meant to solve the actual problems, and equally, anticipated future problems. Education public policies are based on dynamic processes – elaboration, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation - that operates in a social, economic and political medium in permanent change. The identification of problems and consequences (expected and unexpected) of the education public policies is too often approached at a superficial level, without a profound analyses, being done mainly on the basis of ex – ante studies or cost – benefice analyses which are not always part of the public policies elaboration process (for example the abolition of vocational schools). The necessary impact studies are missing. The most difficult part – that of implementation – needs time and enough and affordable resources. The external circumstances should not impose compulsion. The public policies in education should be based on the cause – effect theory, with direct relations, and less intermediate conjunctions. It is necessary to understand and accept/share the policy objectives. The tasks should be totally defined and come under the sequences. Perfect coordination and communication should not miss.

Regarding the time, meaning the period of time needed the change to be accepted by the critical mass, Fullan (2006) sustains that in order to state the progress as a result of the changes, it is not so important how well the change is planned but the realistic expectancies regarding the period of time. On the one hand, the change appears first at the individual level and then at the organizational level, on the other hand, the individuals accept change or innovation in different ways. Starting from the way individuals accept the planned change/innovation, Everett, (2003), for the critical mass, identified 5 categories – innovator leaders, early majority, late majority and resistant to change. In order to reduce the number of resistant, their preoccupation should be identified even from the change initiation. The way to answer to these preoccupation should also be identified. Consequently, the intended changes and the promoted education public policies should be done in full awareness of the interdependencies and influences between education and socio – human domains such as ethics, sustainability and social justice.

Boston, Bradstock, and Eng (2011) underline the indestructible relation between public policy and ethics, the conclusion being that the indissoluble relation between the ethical considerations and the public policy is complex, challenging, controversial generating, but vital in the process of elaboration, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the policies and mainly for the functioning in democratic parameters. Starting from the definitions of ethics and sustainability – considering all its dimensions (social, economic, environmental), sustainability can be subsumed to ethics. But the concept of sustainability and especially this of sustainable development cannot be separated from the social problems to which the public policies address. For the education policy mainly sustainability should be a key element. The public policies must identify the practices that make themselves sustainable and which make them create opportunities,

education services and learning process that promote sustainability. Sustainability involves aspects regarding the equilibrium between structure, institutions and the functioning of the education system, and, at the same time, the equilibrium between their functions for the different parts and groups in society – (Archer, 1984).

Starting from this Archer's acceptance regarding sustainability, Pretorius (2014) considers the lack of sustainability normal and having different forms. For example, in our education system, at the level of teaching – learning – assessment process, teachers concentrate her/his attention more on the so considered very good and good results students against the others, a university wishing to get academic recognition invests more in research than in the teaching – learning process, or the excessive bureaucracy leads the education system to the incapacity to answer the needs of the direct beneficiary, of the staff and ultimately of the society. The lack of sustainability leads to school fail with all the derived "chain" of consequences – absenteeism, early school leaving to inadaptability, anti – social behaviour and so on.

Seghezzo (2009) suggests the re–thinking of sustainability from the ontological perspective, respectively starting from the person/individual, the place, the durability / constancy, he adds the social justice to the indissoluble link between public policy, ethics and sustainability. It is question less that the economic challenges, the climatic changes, the biodiversity, the multiculturalism, the lack of political consensus require public policies in education that directly contribute to sustainability and social justice.

The institutional guiding marks of the education public policies are the school and the university. Looked as sub – systems of the education macro –system, those should develop a coherent quality management (that actually lacks in Romania) to generate progress, not very complicated (such as to be understood by all the beneficiary), to allow a minimum hierarchy, to involve all the interested actors, not to produce bureaucracy and to accord the community needs with the national requests. In this respect we propose the implementation of quality management associated to the Juran trilogy. This involves three main phases – Planning – Control – Improvement (PCI), that could be graphically represented by a helicoid. This is generated by simultaneous application of a circular movement in the horizontal plan of the PCI triangle and of a linear vertical motion (in time) there in it determines / describes an ascendant spiral (Figure 01).
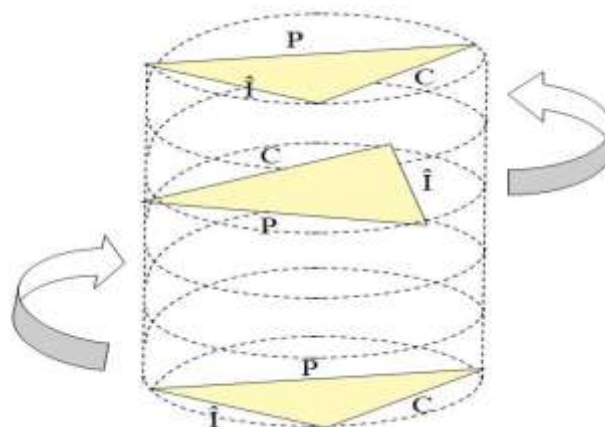

Figure 01. Proposal regarding the evolution of an education subsystem inspired by quality trilogy (Juran, 2003):   P – Planning; C – Control; Î – Improvement. Source: Popescu, (2011), doctoral thesis, Research on the implementation of quality management in the Romanian pre-university education system, The Academy of Economic Studies, 2011

For the described process of elaboration, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and improvement of the education public policy we need:

➢ Settle the vision, mission and the values as well as the critical development areas;

➢ Action plans for the implementation of the development programs;

➢ Training and involving the skilled/competent staff in all the reference area activities;

➢ Coherent use of the methods and work on a long enough period of time.

7. Conclusion

The philosophy of governance in education should be the frame for the education public policy. Meaning the capacity to anticipate the future problems, including the critical premises based on data, information and tendencies and the capacity to design policies that anticipates the change - VISION. Actions, decisions and processes to take decisions that are open and known by all stakeholders, including the civil society – TRANSPARENCY.   The capacity and flexibility to rapidly answer to the society evolution and changes, considering the civil society expectancy in order to identify the general public concern, as well as the capacity to analyse the own activity in critical spirit – REPONSE. Actions and decisions are correlated to the clear stated and shared by all parts objectives – RESPONSABILITY. The capacity to implement measures that guarantee the results satisfy the intentions the education public policies were elaborated and implemented for, quality at the lowest cost and so on – EFFICIENCY AND EFICACY. And of course, LAW SUPREMACY – equal, transparent law Figure 02. (Hoffmann, 2011).

Figure 02. Governance in education public policies. Source: (Hoffmann, 2011)

The problems regarding the low level of learning should be identified, a political strategy should be developed in order to ”mobilize” the support of all the interested actors (political parties, union trades, business milieu, local administrations, students, parents and teachers associations, NGOs, mass media), a long term coalition for education should be done. We need to encourage partnerships between schools/universities and communities, we have to improve the administrative capacity of all central and local entities involved in education.

Romania is placed on the last positions at the international evaluations, the percentage of early school leaving is very high, and the rate of lifelong learning make us be the last in EU. The most important problem being the territorial disparities, the access, the equal opportunities and the quality of education.

According to "A World Bank Group Flagship Report, World Development Report – 2018 (WDR 2018), *Learning to Realize Education Promise",* without the effort of accomplishing coalitions for learning, in the sense of unifying all the forces that for a quality education in a rapid evolution and changing society, the reforms in education have no chance to be effective and succeed. In Romania, the approach of coalitions / association is possible from the technical perspective, practically all the documents and discourses from the experts in the field to the political class, from the civil society to the last community member allow and encourage such an approach. The problem is the implementation and the identification of the mechanisms to make all aware of the necessity to pass from discourses to facts.

Information and data are needed in order to do the education system analyse and evaluation, but mainly for the decisions regarding the education perspective. The needed information should be identified and assumed by all the direct interested actors and there should be decided why this information is needed, which is the source that can give it, who should collect it and what it will be used for.

The evaluation of the quality – efficiency rate in education should be reported to the key criteria in education – equity, efficacy, efficiency, and should sight out the system capacity to equalize the success chances for all, the accomplishment level of the educational system finalities, the measure the pedagogical resources and the infrastructure correspond to and are valued and valorized for learning and for lifelong learning.

Actions on three ranks are needed:

1. Collecting information;

2. Coalitions for learning;
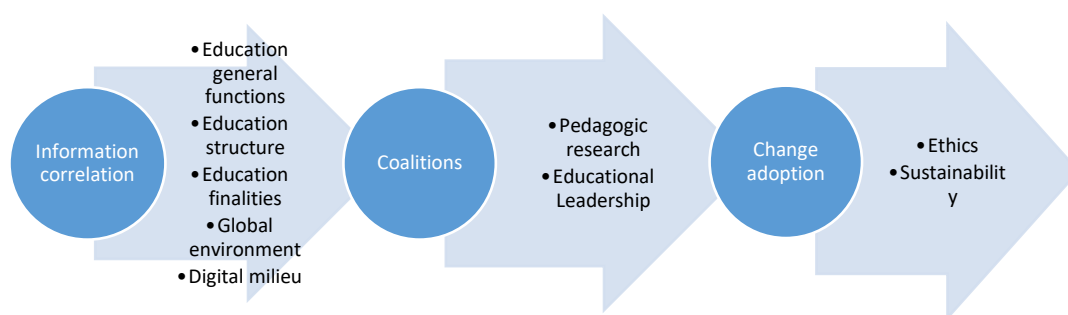
3. Change adoption. (Figure 03).

Figure 03. The succession of the approach in education changes. Source: author

Starting from the generalized perception that the automatics and technology will reduce the number of jobs, President of the World Bank Group (World Development Report, 2019) declares implacably that the report assumes the primacy of human capital without which the technology and automatics cannot evolve: "Many jobs today, and many more in the near future, will require specific skills, a combination of technological know-how, problem-solving, and critical thinking as well as soft skills such as perseverance, collaboration, and empathy". The success key is lifelong learning. "Innovation will continue to accelerate, but developing countries will need to take rapid action to ensure they can compete in the economy of the

future. They will have to invest in their people with a fierce sense of urgency - especially in health and education, which are the building blocks of human capital".

From our own experience, the medium and long term options should conduct to informed decisions for coherent, integrated, stable and well-coordinated education public policies. The elaboration of the future 2021 - 2027 sectorial strategies / ex – ante conditionality should be done on the basis of long term orientation/ principles – 2030 – 2040 – 2050. Romania, also needs a good positioning in the perspective of the future Partnership Agreement with European Commission negotiation.

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